





## From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

### Dark age for Christianity

The video from the Internet was wrenching. Although the description that follows omits as many of the most repulsive details as possible, those with weak stomachs may want to skip the next two paragraphs.

As the video begins, a bound and blindfolded young man has been forced to his knees. The scene is outside the rear of a non-descript building in an unidentified location. Another man with his face covered to prevent identification steps into the camera frame behind the young man and reads a lengthy manifesto explaining why the young man deserves to die.

When the second man finishes his pronouncement, he pulls a large knife from his belt and inflicts a serious wound on the young man — but intentionally not serious enough to kill him right away. The young man falls face down into the dust, writhing in pain and panic as his life slowly seeps away and the camera continues to roll.

Then it's over. The defenseless young man breathes his last. The assassin shouts praise to his god, in whose name he has committed the killing, and walks away. The video ends.

Atrocities such as this are being repeated in far-flung places around the world in the name of religion, politics, and oftentimes both. Our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ are among the victims.

This is not the time of the Roman emperor Nero, who covered crucified Christians in tar as they hung in agony and burned them for nighttime illumination of his gardens. These atrocities are happening now.

Islamist terrorists have overrun the city of Mosul in Iraq, stripping Christians of their possessions and ordering them to leave with the clothes on their backs. If any Christians decline to do so, the terrorists have promised to execute them in a most torturous fashion — women and children included.

As for their fellow Muslim residents of Mosul, the United Nations reports that the terrorists have ordered women and young girls to undergo genital mutilation known as female circumcision. The procedure, carried out by virtual butchers in the most filthy of conditions, is too awful to further describe here.

"We have had people massacred, their heads chopped off," said Canon Andrew White, the vicar of the only Anglican church left in Iraq, in a July

26 interview with the Independent newspaper of London. "Are we seeing the end of Christianity? We are committed come what may, we will keep going to the end, but it looks as though the end could be very near."

Meanwhile, Chinese officials have ordered the demolition of the 1,000-member Xiaying Holy Love Church in Ningbo as part of an intense crackdown on the Christian movements flourishing in many parts of the communist-ruled country, according to a May 30 article in Christianity Today magazine.

China observers have also noted in recent weeks that crosses have been forcibly removed from the exteriors of churches and destroyed, while house church leaders are being detained and worship services disrupted at an alarming pace.

It appears we are entering — yes, in the midst of — a dark age for Christianity and its practitioners. Even in countries like America that don't put believers to the sword, we are often ridiculed and mocked and dismissed to the point that our opinions and objections are considered unimportant. Just watch a little modern American television, if you have doubts.

What's a Christian to do? We don't have large armies we can send to defend persecuted brothers and sisters in every corner of the world. Our governments are reluctant to get involved, sometimes for understandable reasons but most often not. To us, the situation seems overwhelming and unstoppable.

We must pray. Pray for the persecuted and the innocents. Pray for those who have been led astray by false doctrine and false teachers, whose hearts have been hardened to the point they see killing for the faith as acceptable to them and applauded by their god. Pray that everyone in the world will have the opportunity to hear the Gospel (Matt. 28:18-20).

We must go. How else will the world know of our Savior? We must be unashamed and fearless in our effort to win the world to Jesus. That will take a lot of money, so we must also be generous in our support of Christian missions. We must remember too that a lost neighbor or a lost family across town (you know, the ones who don't look like us) are equally important to the Heavenly Father.

We know the clock is ticking down. We know we have a lot of work to do before it runs out. Let's get on with it.

## Must we battle ourselves?

Much of the language in the New Testament is of a militant nature. Believers are often referenced as soldiers. Warfare is a common theme and words like battle, fight, and defeat are used regularly. The real enemy is Satan and this worldly system we superintend.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesian church: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

Throughout the passing decades of the last half-century the church has, quite ironically, battled itself as much or more than it has battled the world. Frequently, rather than engaging the world and confronting the world, the church has instead taken up arms against itself.

Strong opinions about a variety of issues have led to deep divisions, animosity, and even church splits. This effectual fighting against one another has been cause for Satan to break out the celebratory champagne.

Petty battles, however, albeit defending deeply held convictions, may have felt like spiritual warfare to those involved, but frequently these engagements have served to drain the church of its spiritual, emotional, and physical energy and sometimes its monetary resources.

These battles certainly have been cause for delight to the enemy of our souls. Quite simply, believers in recent decades in particular have struggled to identify the real enemy and the real battlefield worthy of their attention.

Believers are called to be warriors in this conflict, not spectators. They are expected to properly identify the true enemy and his tactics. A warrior has been defined as "a brave or experienced soldier or fighter." It takes skill, resolve, and determination to defeat any enemy. Our opponent is formidable and should never be taken lightly by the church of the Lord Jesus.

Warfare is never as glamorous as some of its romanticized depictions. Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy: "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3). A soldier's life entails plenty of hardships, but Paul admonished Timothy that he must endure.



Guest opinion  
with Allen Raynor

Unfortunately, to look at the attitude and approach of many professing believers, one might easily get the impression the war has long since ended. Charles Thomas "C.T." Studd (1860-1931), the great British missionary who served in the Belgian Congo, captured somewhat of the urgency when he famously wrote, "Some want to live within the sound of a church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."

Many Christians today have lost sight of who the real enemy is and are not keenly aware of what he is actually doing. The second stanza of *Onward Christian Soldiers* optimistically states, "We are not divided; all one body we; one in hope and doctrine, one in charity."

Sadly, we could only wish those words were true in our times.

Throughout the passing decades of the last half-century the church has, quite ironically, battled itself as much or more than it has battled the world. Frequently, rather than engaging the world and confronting the world, the church has instead taken up arms against itself.

We have been divided across denominations, within our own denomination, and even within our own local churches. An army battling within its own ranks is music to the ears of the enemy.

While many argue over issues, preferences, and other minutiae that will not even exist in a few years, the enemy is advancing and the church is often in retreat.

Before we are going to be effective soldiers we must first realize there is a war raging and too many believers are not carrying out, or even aware of, their assignments.

Raynor is senior pastor of First Church in Rogers, Texas. His commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press. Edited for style and length.

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# Leaders see border plight, up close and personal

**SAN ANTONIO (BP)** — Ronnie Floyd, president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), and Russell D. Moore, president of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, joined others July 22 for tours of two centers established to address the crisis of unaccompanied minors crossing America's southern border.

The centers in McAllen and San Antonio, Texas, are part of the response to a wave that includes more than 57,000 unaccompanied children who have been apprehended at the border with Mexico in the last nine months. Most of the children, and sometimes children accompanied by a young parent or parents, have fled Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, which are plagued not only by poverty but by violence among gangs involved in drug trafficking.

"I was struck as we were walking through the facility with two things: a sense of fear and a sense of hope — a sense of fear when I asked the kids why they made the trek up to the United States, and a sense of hope [when] I saw many crosses and Bibles. Many people are desperately hoping for an end to the violence where they come from," Moore said in a written statement.

Floyd, senior pastor of the multi-campus Cross Church in Springdale, Ar., said, "These are real people who are looking for hope, and we have the greatest hope that anyone can give them. ... [W]e need to provide them that hope — hope that we love them, hope that we care for them, hope most of all in the Gospel of Jesus Christ that will change their life and give them hope forever, whether they remain in the United States or they go back to their homeland."

"People will go a long way and tackle obstacles when they feel that hope is possible. They are hoping for a better life."

Floyd and Moore were among pastors and other religious leaders who walked through a U.S. Customs and Border Protection detention center in McAllen and a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services shelter in San Antonio. Among those participating in one or both of the tours hosted by the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC) were Jim Richards, the SBTC's executive director; Daniel Flores, the Roman Catholic bishop of Brownsville, Texas and SBTC pastors.

About 65 children are in the detention center in McAllen, which is a major border crossing point near the southern tip of Texas, but that number will mushroom. The center, opened only a few days earlier to alleviate overcrowding in other McAllen detention centers, can house 1,000 children.

The shelter at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio has more than 1,100 children. The McAllen center had children ranging in age from about five to 17, while the San Antonio shelter is for 12- to 17-year-olds.

Floyd and Moore had expressed concern for the children before going to Texas, and they said touring the facilities personalized the issue for them.

"It makes it really real to me," Floyd told Baptist Press. "It's no longer about something... that I hear on the news or stories that I read, but now I've seen real people who have real moms and dads, who have real grandparents, who have taken long treks across the country... all looking for a better life, all looking for hope, all looking for safety. They want safety because many of their lives have not been safe."

Moore said the visit "put a human face on a moral crisis for me. These children are not issues to be resolved but persons bearing dignity and needing care. The issues involved in this crisis are complex, but our first response should be one of compassion and justice, not fear or disgust."



**ON THE SCENE** — Russell D. Moore (at podium), president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, speaks at a news conference in McAllen, Texas, after Southern Baptist and other religious leaders toured a detention center for unaccompanied children who have crossed the border with Mexico. Also speaking at the press conference was Ronnie Floyd (left), president of the Southern Baptist Convention. (BP photo)

Moore said he is "deeply encouraged by the response of Christians to this crisis. We need to be praying for a just resolution, and quickly."

Floyd expressed gratitude "for the churches who have helped along the way, and I want to encourage all of our Southern Baptist churches to see what's happening and think about what you can do to help as a church. Do what Jesus would do. He would care for the children and show them compassion while we have them in our nation."

Moore signed on to a July 22 letter from the Evangelical Immigration Table (EIT) urging members of Congress to provide the necessary resources and policies

to address the border crisis while not weakening a law combatting human trafficking. The EIT is a coalition of evangelical leaders promoting immigration reform.

Floyd and Moore have called not only for a compassionate response to the plight of the unaccompanied children in this country but for repair of what is generally acknowledged is a broken immigration system.

The EIT has called for a reform that would provide border and workplace security, uphold the rule of law, respect family unity, and establish a path to legal status to those who want to live in this country permanently and are willing to pay penalties and meet the requirements.

Flaws in both the system and its enforcement have resulted in an estimated 11-12 million undocumented immigrants living illegally in the United States.

In 2011, messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention in Phoenix approved a resolution on immigration reform that called for Christians to advance the Gospel of Jesus while simultaneously calling on our government to secure the nation's borders and pursue a just and compassionate solution to the immigration crisis.

The U.S. Senate passed broad reform legislation last year, but the EIT has said it needs improvement.

## Texas group explains role in illegal immigrant response

**NASHVILLE (BP and local reports)** — A Texas non-profit is responding to criticisms by several former employees of its care of Latin American children who have crossed the border into the U.S.

The nonprofit known by the initials BCFS was identified in Fox News website report as formerly being known as, "Baptist Child & Family Services." Fox News quoted several unnamed former employees in its report who criticized BCFS for its shelter operations at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas and Fort Sill in Oklahoma.

BCFS is not related to the Mississippi Baptist Convention or the Southern Baptist Convention, and receives no funding or other support from either convention. However, it is listed as a partner organization at the Baptist General Convention of Texas website under the Human Care Institutions list of Child/Family Care Institutions.

BCFS is among various affiliated organizations that receive funding from the Texas convention, which also elects a portion of the BCFS trustees.

BCFS, based in San Antonio, states on its website that it is "a global system of health and human services non-profit organizations with locations and programs throughout the U.S. as well as Eastern Europe, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa."

The BCFS website, however, makes no reference to its former Baptist name and does not list the Texas convention among a number of partners. The partner list includes mostly federal agencies such as the U.S. Border Patrol.

BCFS stated, "For 70 years, BCFS has provided high-quality care for children, families and community... with the greatest level of transparency and integ-

rity." It noted that "all persons involved in providing care and service to the children must agree to protect the identities and health records of the children in our care, just as any hospital or childcare operation requires."

Fox News, in its report, said several former employees had alleged "that the government is downplaying the health risks [at the Lackland shelter] and that a security force has been bullying staffers," threatening them with arrest "if they speak publicly about what is happening inside the facility."

BCFS, in its statement, said there had been 119 cases of head lice among the children, 22 with scabies and one Swine Flu diagnosis. Fox News, however, cited a former employee's claim that more than 119 cases of head lice were being treated daily.

"We would put 20 kids in front of us

— 10 in each row. You could see the bugs crawling through their hair," the unnamed source told Fox. Another unnamed source told Fox, "You were on your feet nonstop. They had chicken pox, measles, and there was a concern strep was spreading."

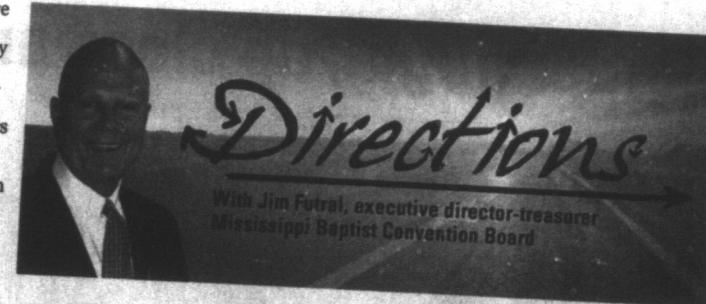
The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, in its Texan Online edition June 5, reported that nearly 50 SBTC volunteers were called into disaster relief-type service in Brownsville the last two weeks of May at a processing shelter for the child refugees from Latin America. The volunteers provided an estimated 1,500 showers, 960 loads of laundry, and 22,500 meals.

"Before we got there, Border Patrol was serving a dry bologna sandwich at 6 a.m. and at 6 p.m., one of the SBTC DR leaders, Jerry Bishop of Luskin, Texas, told the Texan. "We started serving three meals a day."

Some time ago, somebody out there in wherever land started calling this the Information Age. I clearly understand why they started calling it that, though it may be titled the Misinformation Age. With 24-hours a day, unceasing news being forced in our ears and down our throats, with computers that blog, phones that text, and everything that twitters, we have information rushing back and forth at us at speeds that can only be measured in nanoseconds. It is information on steroids and it can and often does get us in trouble. Judith Martin writes a syndicated column that appears in newspapers across the land under a feature called *Miss Manners*. Her article is actually a day-to-day Q & A session with her readers and questioners.

Recently, she received a question from someone who had a new minister on staff. The problem was that the new minister had a practice of whenever he received information about someone who was hospitalized, sick, or having surgery, to send out an email sometimes with much detail, to a number of people across the congregation. Of course, each one of them may have friends or family, acquaintances or contacts in their circle that they could immediately forward it on to in just seconds of time. You can imagine how quickly the word spread reaching across the country or even around the world.

The problem as posed by the questioner had to do with the fact that at times this information was personal and private and at other times had no business being distributed indiscriminately. Miss Manners immediately affirmed the right to privacy and said that it needed to be explained to their new minister. Miss Manners and the questioning congregant were right. While privacy is an important issue, follow-up and confirmation of informa-



## Information, Misinformation, and Hyperinformation

tion is equally important. Some people get information through an email or a phone call and it barely has time to be absorbed into their eyeballs or into the inner ear before it is passed on to others. It may not be correct.

I could tell you of a number of instances through the years that information came to the church or to me and it was misinformation. Sometimes it was in error and at other times, it was totally false. On some occasions, if the information was passed along, it was just embarrassing. I will never forget one morning a call came to the church and the caller wanted to know if we had heard that Mr. So-and-So, one of our members, had died. No, we did not know that he was sick. We did not know that he had something happen during the night and that now his sweet wife, another member of our church, was a widow.

They lived only a few blocks from the church and so upon receiving the information I jumped in my car, rushed

to the house, lightly tapped on the door, and the wife came and answered the door. Not knowing what had really taken place and since I was greeted by a cheery, warm smile from this new widow I did not know quite how to read all that was taking place. I just asked how he was doing and she said, "Well he is doing great. He is sitting in here drinking a cup of coffee. Could you come in and have a cup with us?" I said, "I would love to but let me call the church and let them know that I am going to be a little late getting to the office." I called the office and simply told them that I had stopped by this house and was having a cup of coffee with Mr. So-and-So, who was supposed to be dead. I went and enjoyed another morning cup of coffee. The church secretary called the lady who had reported the death to tell her not to order flowers yet.

That was several years ago and now the problem is far worse. Information that should not be released is damag-

ing. Misinformation can be totally destructive and hyperinformation, just getting the word out there with no checks or double checks, is not just poor immature journalism. It is just out and out wrong. Now for those who may not be alert and aware of privacy issues related to medical information, it is more and more a significant issue both in the medical community and with the church community as there are laws related to disclosure generally referred to as HIPPA laws. They govern what can and cannot be told and what can and cannot be released about a person or their condition.

While I have never personally heard of a church or a group of believers who were sued or threatened with some kind of action because they had given out information, it is not bad to keep in mind that you are not the one to be releasing private information on anyone else. They can do it themselves or ask that it be done but it is extremely helpful for us to treat information discreetly, accurately, and sometimes not at all. How quick we get out information and how fast we can call for prayer support is not nearly as important as making sure we get the right information out and that we do not send out information that the person or the family does not want revealed.

You can always talk to God about things you do not fully understand because if you ever pray that is the way you approach Him. He always sees further, knows more, and understands the connection and the circumstances way beyond anything that you and I are able to comprehend. As the Scripture says, "Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay" (Matt. 5:37). Don't just let your statements be as some unsubstantiated words.

The author can be contacted at [directions@mbcb.org](mailto:directions@mbcb.org).

## Just for the Record



Youth from CEDAR GROVE CHURCH, COLUMBIA, participated in M-Fuge in Greenville, South Carolina.

### In other Church News:

► Grace Crossing Church, Madison, will host the third annual Mississippi Dulcimer Workshops from 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. on August 9. Workshops include hammered dulcimer, mountain dulcimer, ukulele, and penny whistle. Children-only workshops for penny whistle and ukulele, 3:30-4:30 p.m. For more information, contact Jess

Dickinson at (228) 596-6633.

► Pinelake Church, Brandon, is hosting the Passion Band ([www.268generation.com](http://www.268generation.com)) in concert Aug. 1, 9:15 p.m. at the church's reservoir campus auditorium. Free. No walk-ups. For tickets, go to <http://bit.ly/Back2SchoolPassion>.

► Pelahatchie Church, Pelahatchie, will host the Mark Trammell Quartet in concert Aug. 7, 7 p.m. Love offering. Doors open at 6 p.m.



Four adults and 15 students from CENTRAL CHURCH, MCCOMB, attended MissionFuge in Houston June 16 - 21.

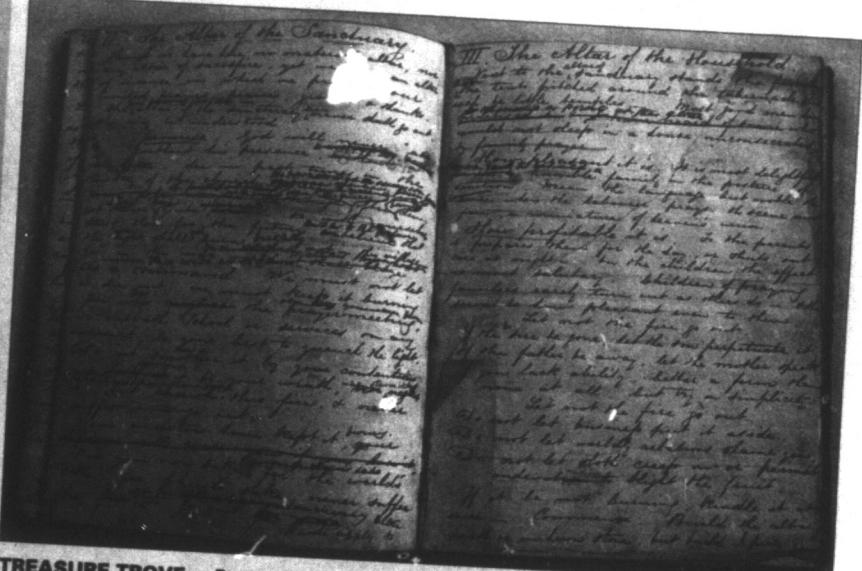


EUREKA CHURCH, RANKIN ASSOCIATION, participated in inner city missions in Memphis July 13 - 18.

## GROWING CHURCHES CONFERENCE JULY 25 - 26



Chip Henderson, pastor, Pinelake Church, Brandon, brings the opening message at the worship celebration at the Growing Churches Conference July 25 - 26 at Park Place Church, Brandon. The conference was a partnership event sponsored by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board Discipleship and Family Ministries Department and 17 Central Mississippi Baptist Associations. It was the largest partnership project of the MBCB and Baptist associations in the history of the conference. The conference was designed so that Mississippi Baptist churches could bring any person who holds a leadership position to the event for fellowship and training. Fifty-five conference leaders offered approximately 116 individual conferences. Conferences were offered in interest areas including Adults; Children/Preschool; Church Growth/Church Administration; Deacons; Discipleship; Evangelism; Leadership Development; Men's Ministry; Ministry/Personal Growth; Missions; Singles; Students; Women's Ministry; Worship/Predaching; and Sunday School. Next year's conference will be August 7 - 8 at Harrisburg Church, Tupelo.



**TREASURE TROVE** — Renowned preacher and pastor Charles Spurgeon's long-lost, handwritten journals from his early ministry in England will be available next year through B&H Publishing Group, a division of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville. (BP photo courtesy of B&H Publishing Group)

## Newly-discovered Spurgeon sermons to be published soon

**NASHVILLE (BP)** — Charles Spurgeon, 19th-century legendary London pastor, was a publishing and preaching juggernaut. He preached to more than 10 million people and baptized more than 14,000 believers. More than 50 million copies of his sermons were sold.

Spurgeon's fans nicknamed him "the Prince of Preachers."

More than 3,500 Spurgeon sermons were eventually published, but none date from his early ministry, a leading Spurgeon scholar, Christian George, noted.

That will change next year. B&H Publishing will release *The Lost Sermons of Charles Spurgeon*, a multi-volume edition of early Spurgeon sermons and sermon outlines.

"I have been involved in Christian publishing for over 20 years," said Jim Baird, publisher of B&H Academic. "A project like this comes to you once in your lifetime if you are fortunate."

The collection of 400-plus sermons and outlines dates from Spurgeon's days as a young pastor outside Cambridge. The son of a minister, Spurgeon came to faith in 1850 during a service at a Primitive Methodist Church. That encounter with God set him on a path to become one of Christendom's most prolific and most quoted preachers.

"It is sometimes overlooked that Charles Spurgeon published more words in the English language than any other Christian in history," said George, curator of the Spurgeon library at Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

Spurgeon began preaching not long after his conversion. At 17, he became pastor of a Baptist church in Waterbeach, not far from Cambridge. He kept his sermon outlines, which he called "skeletons," along with some full-text sermons in a series of handwritten journals.

The first of the 13 newly-discovered journals is dated October 1849, a few months before Spurgeon's conversion. The last is dated from 1854, just before he became pastor of London's New Park Street Chapel.

The journals reveal how Spurgeon developed his theology as well as his skill in preaching.

"They give us a rare and remarkable glimpse into Spurgeon's pre-London life and ministry," George said.

Some of the journals show Spurgeon's spiritual struggles. Many of the sermons end with simple and sometimes blunt prayers. "Lord, revive my stupid soul," Spurgeon wrote after finishing one sermon. Another ended with, "Oh my God. Do help. For Jesus' sake."

After becoming a pastor in London, Spurgeon had planned to publish those early sermons but that never came to pass. They were stored in the archives of Spurgeon's College in London and forgotten.

George discovered the journals three years ago while doing research at the college. A librarian there brought him a stack of Spurgeon's journals to look through. "Only when I began flipping through their pages did I realize the significance," George said. "These were the lost ser-

mons Spurgeon tried so long ago to publish."

The multi-volume set from B&H Academic will include sermons from those journals along with critical commentary from George, in what will be the first critical edition of Spurgeon's work ever published.

Most other works about Spurgeon either reprint his sermons without analysis, or only focus on his "celebrity-like reputation, uncanny oratorical abilities and worldwide influence," George said. That leaves many people with a one-dimensional view of the great preacher.

There is a growing interest in Spurgeon scholarship in recovering his humanity — his inconsistencies, his weaknesses, his doubts, struggles and sufferings," George said. "In this way, we discover a Spurgeon who does not arrive on the theological landscape of 19th-century Britain in perfect, polished form but, instead, a preacher in progress whose exegesis, rhetorical tendencies and homiletic method evolve over the first five years of his preaching ministry."

George hopes the new edition of early Spurgeon sermons will lead to more scholarly interest in the great preacher. Pastors, he said, also will benefit. "He models for us an unwavering commitment to Christ-centered preaching, fervent prayer and discipleship, local and world evangelism, and incarnational urban ministries."

When the new books are published next year, digital versions will be available exclusively through WORDsearch.

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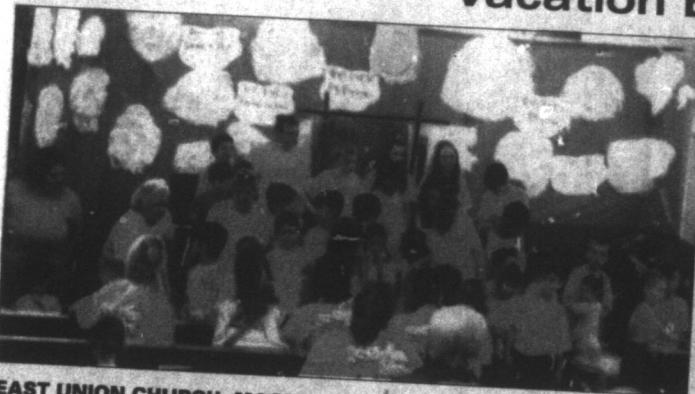
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## Vacation Bible School



**EAST UNION CHURCH, MAGNOLIA:** July 11 - 13.



**FIRST CHURCH, BOYLE:** July 6 - 11; offering, \$550 to Baptist Children's Village; Sandra Edwards and Faith McMinn, directors.



**GRACE UNITED CHURCH, DECATUR:** June 16 - 20, with commencement July 22; 35 - 40 enrolled; Zach Butler, minister of youth; Michelle Addy, music; Gary Felton, pastor.



**SLAYDEN CHURCH, MARSHALL ASSOCIATION:** 90 students, 79 teachers/helpers; \$2417.72 mission offering going to missionaries in Southeast Asia and Russia; Lisa Jones, director; Rusty Fair, pastor.



**FIRST CHURCH, EUPORA:** 130 enrolled.



**CENTRAL CHURCH, MCCOMB:** Justin Woullard, pastor.



**CALVARY CHURCH, SUMMIT:** July 7 - 11; total enrollment, 104; average attendance, 95; David Millican, interim pastor; Kody Tullis, director.



**ROUNDAWAY CHURCH, DODDSVILLE:** June 15-20; enrollment, 86; offering of \$444 for Malaysia longhouses; Bob Hill, pastor; Gina Staggs, director.

## Just for the Record



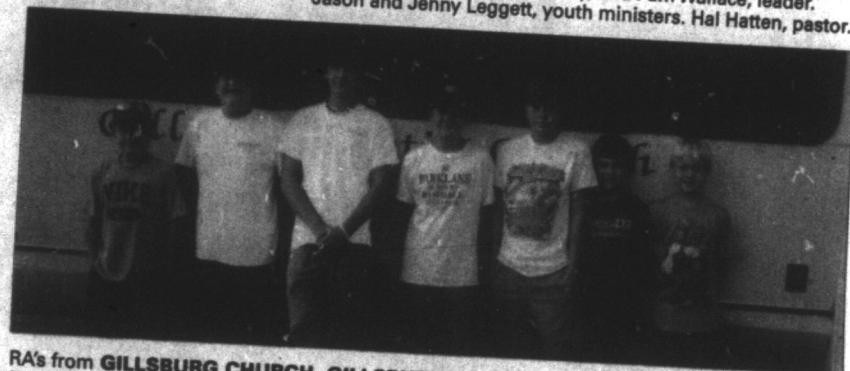
High school and college students from **LIBERTY CHURCH, FLOWOOD**, participated in a World Changers project in Guayama, Puerto Rico, July 13-19. Shown are Addison Barton, Zack Boone, Stephen Cofer, Sarah Stubbs, Daniel Rawson, Parker Middleton, Katie Hubbard, and Kate Mackey.



**CALVARY CHURCH, BOGUE CHITTO**, had three students attend Super Summer @ Mississippi College. Attending were Carrie Pyeatt, Kara Beth Crosby, and Pam Wallace, leader. Jason and Jenny Leggett, youth ministers. Hal Hatten, pastor.



**BEULAH CHURCH, DECATUR**, honored pastor Gary Rivers July 20 for having served in the ministry for 50 years. Rivers was licensed to preach July 12, 1964. Shown are Rivers and Randall Lee presenting a plaque. Rivers also received flowers, a cake, and a lunch.



RA's from **GILLSBURG CHURCH, GILLSBURG**, spent a week at Central Hills Retreat near Kosciusko. Shown are Luke Williams, Davin Hughes, Brady Wilson, Conner Wilson, Mason Pounds, Beau Williams, and Maddox Williams.



**FAIR RIVER CHURCH, BROOKHAVEN**, held a parent/baby dedication Father's Day. Shown are the Millers with Maggie Elizabeth, the Smiths with Hadden James, the Watsons with Parker Allen, and pastor Jay Anderson.



Students from **FIRST CHURCH, EUPORA**, attended Super Summer at Mississippi College. Participants included William Mixon, Wil Bailey, Keely Cresap, Madison Hester, Parker Blaylock, Clayton Mixon, Madeline Mixon, and Greer Blaylock. Kevin and Taylor Barnette also attended the event, with Kevin serving as an instructor.



**PARKWAY CHURCH, KOSCIUSKO**, recognizes its graduates. Shown are Jimmy Thornhill, Courtney Ashmore, Tyler Bingham, Hannah Ellard, Anna McCrory, and Timothy Wallace.



Boys from **MT. OLIVET CHURCH, SCOTT COUNTY**, attended the boy's mission camp at Central Hills Retreat. Shown, front, are Cade Smith, Zack Harrison, and Austin Doughty; back, Ethan Crain, Eli Cooper, Tyler Betts, Franklin Joe Bradley, and Landin Pierce.



# BIBLIOCRYPTER

OWIL WBJI NGSZIE HSTFN, NHIBTXEA

MBCNCL XE DBZXEA B VSJIEBEO:

OWKN YKFADIEO NGTXEAIOW KG BN

WIDCSVZ XE OWI MKTTSHN SM OWI

MXICF.

WSNIB OIE: MSKT

Clue: Z = K

*Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Amos 3:4*

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004, © 2005

## Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted. Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lit. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

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## MOSUL

cont. from p. 1

believed to be the burial place of the prophet whose preaching saved the city of Nineveh in the Old Testament Book of Jonah.

Mosul became a familiar location to Southern Baptists in 2004 when four Christian aid workers affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention were ambushed there. Larry Elliott, Jean Elliot, David McDonnell, and Karen Watson died in the attack.

Carrie McDonnell, David's wife, was critically wounded in the attack but survived.

Shea, an international human rights attorney, said fighters with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) marked the property of Christians in Mosul with the Arabic word, "Nasrani," or "Nazarene," a clear reference to Christianity. Christian property owners were then driven out.

Last month militants offered Christians in Mosul the opportunity to enter into a dhimma, an agreement which would have allowed them to practice the Christian faith behind closed doors after they paid a hefty tax and agreed not to proselytize.

However, multiple sources in the region said that offer was later withdrawn and all Christians were told to leave or face execution. Reuters also reported that the United Nations has accused ISIS of ordering all women in the area they control to undergo the genital mutilation known as female circumcision.

Members of Assyrian Christian and Chaldean Catholic groups streamed out of Mosul when the final ultimatum was delivered this week by ISIS militants, Shea said, and they left empty handed. Militants confiscated all of their possessions, including homes, cars, clothes, and even their wedding rings, sometimes with the finger attached if it would not come off," she said.

Shea also said she saw reports of ISIS militants destroying or

defacing ancient Christian sites, such as the supposed tomb of Jonah, fourth century monasteries, and churches. She added that militants tore down crosses in the city and burned ancient Christian manuscripts.

"They are rabidly bigoted against Christians. They hate Christians. They are eradicating every trace of the 2,000 year history of Christianity in every area they have conquered, including in Iraq's second largest city, the center of Christianity in Iraq, which is Mosul."

David Curry, president and CEO of Open Doors USA, which offers assistance to persecuted Christians around the world and lobbies repressive governments to cease religious persecution, called the plight of Christians in Mosul and the remainder of northern Iraq "unprecedented in modern times."

This latest forced exodus of Christians further shows why Western governments and the people in the West need to cry out in support for religious freedom in the Middle East and elsewhere," Curry said in a statement.

"If this does not move us concerning the near extinction of Christianity in the Middle East, it's likely nothing else can," he said.

Since the United States invaded Iraq in 2003 to overthrow Saddam Hussein, nearly one million Christians have fled the country for safer surroundings. An estimated 500,000 Christians remained throughout the northern portion of the country, chiefly among the Chaldean Catholic community, which has existed there for 1,700 years.

The archbishop for the region, Shimoun Nona, told the Catholic World Report after Mosul fell to militants in June that the Christian population had dropped to 35,000 and then to only 3,000.

According to recent reports from the region, only a few hundred Christian families re-

mained in Mosul before ISIS gave its ultimatum last week. Its stance toward Christians who remained may mean the hardened Al-Qaeda offshoot is becoming even more intolerant of dissenting faiths as it tightens control over a large swath of the plain of Nineveh, where Mosul is located.

Even prominent Sunni Muslim scholars claimed the forced deportation of Christians from their homes was not a true representation of Islamic doctrine. Sheikh Youssef al-Qaradawi said the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS) condemns the actions of ISIS.

Christians "are native sons of Iraq and not intruders," according to a statement to Reuters from the group in Doha, Qatar on July 22. "The aim must be to bury discord, unite the ranks and solve Iraq's problems, rather than thrusting it into matters that would further complicate the situation."

IUMS does not disavow the notion of an Islamic caliphate as a goal to be obtained in the future. It claims, however, that a majority of Muslims in an area have to agree to join such a caliphate. That makes the caliphate announced with force by ISIS unlawful, according to the group.

The reach of ISIS began to expand into northern Iraq after fighting spilled over into the country from Syria in the spring. Militants overtook Mosul June 10, followed by the city of Tikrit, home of the late former Iraqi strong man Saddam Hussein, less than 100 miles from Baghdad.

They captured Tal Afar and portions of the "Sunni Triangle" in western Iraq, including Ramadi and Fallujah. ISIS also temporarily took the town of Baquba, less than 40 miles from Baghdad, June 16.

The terrorist group now controls nearly one third of Iraq and Syria, an area larger than Jordan, Lebanon and Israel combined.

## Truth is not relative.

Find it in the One who is the way, truth, and life.

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)

2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)

3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)

4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life.

From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

# THE VILLAGE VIEW



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## GIFTS OF HONOR AND MEMORY

A portion of The Village View is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Many groups and individuals elect to pay tribute to others through this sensitive, meaningful, and helpful medium. This feature is hopefully designed to further honor, with taste and respect, those who are and have been special to our special friends.

### MARCH 2014

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## BCV EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

### Immediate Opening for Social Services Secretary (Ridgeland, MS)

The BCV has an immediate opening for an individual to fill the position of Social Services Secretary in the agency's headquarters in Ridgeland. The individual filling this position must be a mature Christian adult with personal integrity, Christian character and a sound reputation. This individual must also have a demonstrated commitment to the ethical standards incumbent upon each staff member of the BCV staff and an appreciation of the confidentiality extended to children and families served by the BCV. This individual must be able to deal with children and adults in a warm, accepting manner. The successful candidate must have a minimum of a high school diploma or equivalent, and training and experience in general secretarial tasks and be proficient in general office computing tasks, specifically word processing, spreadsheet applications and data entry in various applications. Other significant responsibilities include phone coverage, extensive filing and significant interactions with members of the social service and clinical staff.

To apply for this position, you may complete the application found at [www.baptistchildrensvillage.com](http://www.baptistchildrensvillage.com) and send it, along with a statement of faith and a resume copy to Kristen Slaven, Director of Social Services at 114 Marketridge Drive, Ridgeland, MS 39157. You may contact Ms. Slaven at [kslaven@baptistchildrensvillage.com](mailto:kslaven@baptistchildrensvillage.com) or 601-952-2422.

## BCV EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

### Immediate Openings for Case Managers (Statewide)

The BCV has immediate openings for individuals to fill the position of Case Manager on several of its campuses across the state. The individuals filling these positions must be mature, Christian adults, with personal integrity, Christian character and sound reputation. These individuals must have a demonstrated commitment to the ethical standards incumbent upon each staff member of the BCV staff and an appreciation of the confidentiality extended to children and families served by the BCV. Successful candidates for this position must have a demonstrated ability to cultivate adaptive relationships with both children and adults. These individuals must also have the ability to effectively communicate, through both written and spoken language, exhibit sound clinical judgment, tact and assertiveness, and be able to work effectively with residents, their families, referral sources and BCV staff. As this position requires a great deal of direct contact with residents and their families, successful candidates for this position must have a relatively flexible schedule and be able to work at those times when the residents are on campus or when their families may be available.

Individuals seeking this position must have a master's degree in a social or behavioral science field. An individual with a bachelor's degree in a social or behavioral science field and extensive case management experience in the field of residential or mental health care may be considered.

To apply for this position, you may complete the application found at [www.baptistchildrensvillage.com](http://www.baptistchildrensvillage.com) and send it, along with a statement of faith and a resume copy to Dr. Randy Cotton, Director of Programs and Clinical Services at 114 Marketridge Drive, Ridgeland, MS 39157. You may contact Dr. Cotton at [rcotton@baptistchildrensvillage.com](mailto:rcotton@baptistchildrensvillage.com) or 601-952-2422.

## Radical Faith: Risk Everything for God • Daniel 3:1,8-12,15b-18,24-25,28

King Nebuchadnezzar built a 90 foot statue of himself and decreed that everyone worship the statue when the music played a certain song or be thrown into a fiery furnace. Word got to the king that three Hebrew boys refused to worship his image. Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael were not strangers to King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 2:49 reads, "Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king." (KJV). This was the previous verse before this story in Daniel chapter 3, so it had happened recently. This text used their Babylonian names but let's use their godly Hebrew names instead.

The King called Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael to give them another chance to bow down before the graven image. He warned them that if they did not worship his image they would be thrown into the fiery furnace within the hour and that no god could protect them. They replied in Daniel 3:17-18, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will

not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." (KJV).

The king was furious and had the furnace heated seven times hotter than it ever been before. He had the three boys bound and cast into the furnace. The fire, however, did not harm the three boys and they walked around in it. He looked in the furnace and exclaimed in Daniel 3:25, "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." (KJV). The fourth man in the fire was the son of God who protected these three boys from the fire.

The King was amazed and called the three boys out of the fire, for they were completely unharmed. He praised the one true living God for such an amazing miracle that he witnessed. It truly was a mighty miracle that is remembered to



### Explore the Bible

with Rick Henson

this day. King Nebuchadnezzar rescinded his order and allowed worship of the Hebrew God.

After they were rescued, however, the three Hebrew boys still lived in a foreign land with names that brought glory to false gods and they were still slaves having to speak a foreign language. God chose

to deliver them from the fiery furnace but he chose not to rescue them from slavery. Other than spiritual, all healing is

temporary. Even when the Lord answers our prayers the way that we desire, we certainly will have other problems later, and maybe the same problems again.

The Hebrew boys proclaimed to the king that their God was able to deliver them. They added that if God did not rescue them they still would not bow down to his image nor serve his gods. They realized that The Lord was God whether He

answered their prayers a specific way or not. And their service to God was not dependent on His answering their prayers or rescuing them from a fiery furnace. Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael were willing to die in the furnace, but they were not willing to worship a false god.

We learn from this story that God may choose to rescue us from a proverbial or literal fiery furnace. He may, however, choose to allow us to go through a fiery ordeal. Ephesians 6:16 reminds us, "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." (KJV). And 1 Peter 4:12 cautions, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." (KJV).

The Lord is our God and is worthy of our praise whether He rescues us from the fiery trials or whether He gives us what we need to endure the trials. When trials come our way, and they will, may we face them as well as did Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael.

Henson is pastor of Oakdale Church, Brandon.

## Ready Faith • Matthew 22:12-14; 24:39b-44; 24:9-14, Revelation 7:9

For years our children, grandchildren, and I have enjoyed listening to Adventures in Odyssey by Focus on the Family. Recently on a trip, our 18 year old grandson, placed "Blend of Bravery" into the van's CD player. We listened to stories about Telemachus, Saint Valentine, and Saint Patrick. Awesome stories about great men who had resilient faith, stood strong in the midst of suffering, and were martyrs for their faith. These vividly recorded stories should challenge the listeners to learn more about those who were persecuted for their faith. Foxes Book of Martyrs and Voice of the Martyrs ([www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com)) are just two resources to learn more about persecution past and present.

Fiery trials, suffering, or persecution for our faith is not permanent—this world is not our home! Peter is encouraging his readers to "Prepare for the best" writes Warren Wiersbe. Our lesson today will challenge us to live a life of faith which is ready for the future, ready to point others to the Living Hope, and ready to follow the example of Jesus' suffering.

It has been said, a person is preparing for a trial, in a trial currently, or coming out of a trial. Suffering may come as a result of wrong decisions, life in general, someone else's decisions, but there

may be undeserved suffering because we have done the right thing. Today, standing upon the precepts of God's Word will bring suffering. Peter's audience was being persecuted for pursuing peace and doing what was good and right. The Bible teaches we are to fear God, not man. Peter knew from personal experience what it was like to reverse this command having denied Christ three times. Yet, from that

moment to the day he faced a martyr's death he chose to fear God and boldly proclaimed the Good News. In verse 14,

Peter writes, when you suffer "for righteousness' sake . . . you will be blessed." Therefore we are to "have no fear of them, nor be troubled" (ESV). We have no fear of man because we know what God has done for us (see Isa. 43:1-3; Matt. 5:10; Rom. 8:31-39).

The next passage, verses 15 and 16, are pivotal. The NASB version states: "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts"

and the ESV has "honor Christ the Lord as holy." Whatever the suffering, we are to practice the Lordship of Christ and we are to be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, "yet with gentleness and reverence." The word defense comes from the Greek word "apologian". The English word is "apologetic" and it means to make a case for why you are

a Christian. It is the ability to articulate these beliefs with biblically sound principles, humility, gentleness, and reverence.

Many times we are not aware of the people who are observing us in the suffering. This is an opportunity to point to the hope found in Jesus Christ. "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil . . ." (Heb. 6:19). Furthermore, keep a clear conscience and when people come against you with slander or ridicule, remember there will be a day

when they will be put to shame. Do the right thing!

I prefer the ESV version for the final passage of today's lesson. "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking" (4:1). Christ, who knew no sin, suffered and was triumphant in His suffering. "The worst that can happen to a believer suffering unjustly is death, and that is the best that can happen because death means the complete and final end of all sins. If the Christian is armed with the goal of being delivered from sin, and that goal is achieved through his death, the threat and experience of death is precious. Moreover, the greatest weapon that the enemy has against the Christian, the threat of death, is not effective" (John MacArthur Study Bible). We are under the Lordship of Christ till the day we die, living no longer for selfish human passions and pleasures, but for the will of God.

"Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross; lift high his royal banner, it must not suffer loss. From victory unto victory his army shall he lead, till every foe is vanquished, and Christ is Lord indeed" (text by George Duffield, Jr.).

Leathers is a member of First Church, Madison.

## IBRAHIM

cont. from p. 1

secure proper travel documents to enter the United States.

Al-Sharief Ali, Ibrahim's attorney said, "The Italians had the greatest influence on Sudan and were able to secure her release." Lapo Pistelli, deputy foreign minister for Italy, negotiated Ibrahim's release and accompanied the family to Italy.

"Leveraging ties within the region," Ali said Pistelli negotiated in an amicable way. "This paid off in the end," he said.

Al Khalifa sentenced Ibrahim to death after he had given her 15 days to recant her Christian faith, and as Islamists shouted for the court to punish her. Because she married a Christian, she was also sentenced to 100 lashes for apostasy.

She defended her religious

beliefs by telling Al Khalifa in court, "I am a Christian, and I have never been a Muslim."

Ibrahim was born to a Sudanese Muslim father, who disappeared from her life when she was six years old, and an Ethiopian mother who was an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian. Though her mother reared her as a Christian, Islamic law asserts Ibrahim is Muslim by birth because her father was Muslim. Tony Perkins, president of the

Family Research Council which had launched an online petition drive in Ibrahim's behalf, said in a news release, "Meriam's bold stand for Jesus Christ as she faced death is both an inspiration for Christians to be courageous, but also a reminder of the vigilance required to preserve and promote not just our First Freedom as Americans, but the basic human right of the freedom of religion."

...The ordeal of Meriam and

her family underscores the need for the Obama administration to make the promotion of religious freedom a priority at the State Department rather than an afterthought," Perkins said. "The reality is that there are thousands of Meriams looking toward America, hoping they are not forgotten and that someone will speak out on their behalf."

Tony Perkins is not related to William Perkins, editor of The Baptist Record.

# Analysis: Young religious children grasp worldview

By David Roach  
Correspondent

As early as kindergarten, people have decided whether they believe God intervenes in the world or whether the universe is a closed system of natural causes, a new study by researchers at Boston University, Harvard University, and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology suggests.

Published in the July issue of *Cognitive Science*, the study by Kathleen Corriveau, Eva Chen, and Paul Harris asked five and six year olds to identify whether the protagonists in various stories rendered in several sentences were real people or fictional ones and then provide a reason for their classifications.

Some of the stories were adapted from the Bible and included miraculous events brought about through divine intervention, though several of the accounts got biblical details wrong. Other stories, labelled fantastical, were modifications of the same Bible stories with all references to divine intervention removed and the supernatural events presented as magic. A third group of stories, labelled realistic, modified the Bible stories further to exclude supernatural events and replace them with events that were "plausible due to human intervention."

For example, the study included an adaptation of the biblical David and Goliath story, a fantastical version in which David kills Goliath with a magic stone and a realistic version in which David notices there is no armor protecting the giant's head and attacks the vulnerable region.

Not surprisingly, children who attended church, parochial school, or both identified the biblical protagonists as real more often than children who attended neither church nor parochial school. More unexpectedly, children receiving religious education at church or school also identified the fantastical protagonists as real more often than their secular counterparts. All the children tended to characterize realistic protagonists as real.

In a second facet of the experiment, researchers tried to determine why children with Christian training were more likely to identify religious and fantastical stories as real.



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This time they presented a series of supernatural stories, changing all the characters' names so that they were not recognizable as people in the Bible and including stories of some supernatural events not in Scripture.

Again religious children were more likely than secular children to classify characters from supernatural accounts as real, regardless of whether the supernatural events were described as magic or recounted without reference to magic or divinity. The secular children, researchers said, "systematically treated the characters as pretend."

The study's authors concluded that the divergent responses were not due to the religious children's familiarity with Bible stories or their propensity to believe in magic. Rather, "religious children have a broader conception of what events can actually happen" because they are taught that divine interaction can "override ordinary causal regularities."

In other words, by age six children have already established a belief about whether God does or does not intervene in the world, and they interpret what they observe based on that belief.

Of course, the religious children got some answers wrong too. They misidentified as true some fantastical stories and performed "at chance" when asked about stories that resembled biblical accounts but with different names and events (like John parting a mountain rather Moses parting the sea).

Still, the secular children misidentified the religious stories as false at a higher rate than the religious children misidentified the fantastical stories as true. In the end, the Christian worldview proved more effective at recognizing truth than the secular worldview.

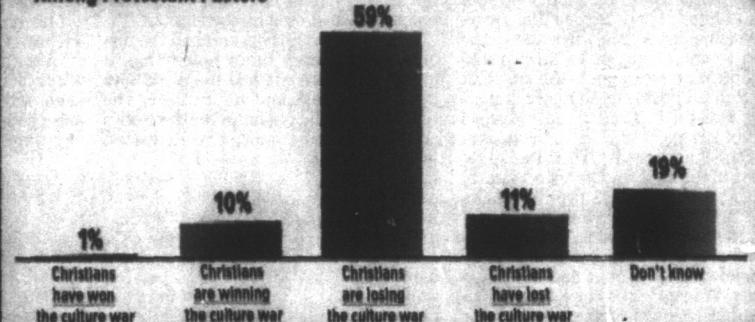
Ironically, a secular study underscores the importance of Christian training for children. That training must begin at home and continue at church. As the Baptist Faith and Message says, "Christianity is the faith of enlightenment and intelligence, and an adequate system of Christian education is necessary to a complete spiritual program for Christ's people."

Even in kindergarten.

Roach is chief national correspondent for *Baptist Press*, the Southern Baptist Convention's news service in Nashville. His analysis appears courtesy of *Baptist Press*.

Many Christian leaders have talked about society being in a culture war. Regardless of how you feel about that terminology, how would you explain the current situation?

## Among Protestant Pastors



LifeWay Research

## Hobby Lobby may be settled, but freedom concerns aren't

**NASHVILLE (BP)** — Most Americans say religious liberty is important, but they don't always agree on how much liberty is enough or too much.

Religious liberty was the issue at the heart of the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling in favor of Hobby Lobby and against the Obama Administration's contraceptive mandate. It's a dispute that is unlikely to go away.

American preachers are more than a bit uneasy about religious liberty these days, according to a survey by LifeWay Research, a division of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville.

The survey found that seven out of 10 senior pastors at Protestant churches said religious liberty is on the decline in America. About seven in 10 also said Christians have lost or are losing the culture war.

Seventy percent agree with the statement, "Religious liberty is on the decline in America." Twenty-seven percent disagree. Self-identified evangelical pastors are more likely to agree (81%) than mainline pastors (47%).

Researchers also asked pastors to respond to the question: "Many Christian leaders have talked about society being in a culture war. Regardless of how you feel about that terminology, how would you explain the current situation?" Fifty-nine percent say Christians are losing. Eleven percent say the culture war is already lost, while 10% say Christians are winning the culture war.

Evangelical pastors are more likely (79%) than mainline pastors (60%) to say Christians are losing or have lost the culture war.

Mainline pastors are also most likely (30%) to say they don't know when asked about the culture war. By contrast, 13% of evangelicals said they don't know. Overall, 19% said they don't know.

### Changing culture

Some of the unease about religious liberty is due to shifts in American culture and church practice, said Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research.

In the 1960s, nearly two-thirds of Americans were Protestants. Today, they make up less than half of the population, according to the General Social Survey. Fewer Protestants means less cultural power, Stetzer said.

Stetzer said in the past, Christians — and Protestants in particular — took it for granted that Americans would look to the church for guidance on moral issues. Churches, he said, were seen as being good for society and so they were given special privileges like exemptions from taxes and other laws.

"Even if people did not go to church, they looked to the church," Stetzer explained. That's no longer the case, as the government and culture no longer defer to Protestant Christians, which makes pastors and their congregations nervous.

"They feel like in some ways there was a pact made at the founding of the country between God and America," he said. "That pact has been broken."

That's not all bad news, Stetzer said. "The fact that 'Christian' is not just a demographic category can have a positive side," Stetzer observed, as it means that Protestants and other Christians have to be more active in living out their faith.

It also has political and social consequences, as a sizable number of Protestants and other Christians run into conflicts with societal norms on issues like sexuality and marriage and other issues. Protestants and like-minded

religious people have to think through a new strategy that defends their religious liberty but also acknowledges that conflict, Stetzer said.

Several recent court battles also may play a role, said Thomas Kidd, professor of history at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and author of *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution*.

Kidd pointed to the Hobby Lobby case as well as the Supreme Court's 2012 *Hosanna-Tabor* ruling. Both involve disputes between the government and religious groups over exemptions from federal law. In both cases, religious liberty was seen as less important than other issues like nondiscrimination or healthcare, Kidd said. "There's a real sense that something has changed dramatically," he said. "Some questions about the meaning of religious liberty are now in play."

Those court battles, as well as the decline in Protestant cultural power, can make pastors nervous. "Less clout plus more aggressive policy creates a sense of crisis," he said.

### Concerns on rise

LifeWay researchers found similar concerns. Fifty-four percent agree with the statement, "Religious liberty is on the decline in America." Thirty-eight percent disagree. Half also agree with the statement: "Christians increasingly are confronted by intolerance in America today." Thirty nine percent disagree.

Researchers also found 34% of Americans say Christians complain too much about how they are treated.

Scott McConnell, vice president of LifeWay Research, said concerns about religious liberty have become widespread. "Half of Americans say that religious liberty is on the decline. That's a lot of people."



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